

Richie Tozier, You Dumbass by HeythereRichie

Category: IT (Movies - Muschietti), IT - Stephen King

Genre: Alternate Universe - College/University, Alternate Universe - Modern Setting, Borderline crack, Gay Eddie Kaspbrak, Incredibly self indulgent, M/M, Oblivious Richie Tozier, Richie Tozier & Stanley Uris Are Best Friends, Richie Tozier Loves Eddie Kaspbrak, Slurs, about the guy who thought he was being homophobic, moment of dubious consent but nothing happens, richie tozier is an idiot, slight angst, stanlon if you squint, that one article from forever ago, this is so stupid, we all love and support Richie Tozier

Language: English

Characters: Ben Hanscom, Beverly Marsh, Bill Denbrough, Eddie Kaspbrak, Mike Hanlon, Richie Tozier, Stanley Uris

Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Original Male Character(s), Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier

Status: Completed

Published: 2019-12-05

Updated: 2019-12-05

Packaged: 2019-12-17 16:39:44

Rating: Not Rated

Warnings: Creator Chose Not To Use Archive Warnings

Chapters: 1

Words: 13,708

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Richie is being a dick. Richie is usually a dick. He knows this, he revels in this. But he's always viewed himself as a dick in a charming way, like the lovable dick that makes you roll your eyes and groan but not the kind of dick that people would be genuinely pissed to have around. Definitely not the kind of guy who's like, homophobic or anything. But apparently that's what he is now. A homophobe.

Richie Tozier, You Dumbass

Author's Note:

Richie isn't this oblivious in the movies, but let's pretend alright

Richie is being a dick. Richie is usually a dick. He knows this, he *revels* in this. But he's always viewed himself as a dick in a charming way, like the lovable dick that makes you roll your eyes and groan but not the kind of dick that people would be genuinely pissed to have around. Definitely not the kind of guy who's like, homophobic or anything. But apparently that's what he is now. A homophobe. A vile, disgusting, worthless little homophobe who deserves to have his lights knocked the fuck out of him. Bev would probably happily do it, if she ever found out about this new revelation of his. Because that's what's happening here, Richie's homophobic awaking, as he walks into the apartment he shares with one Eddie Kaspbrak, who was currently straddling the lap of some random guy, lips on his neck, hands roaming over the guy's chest. Eddie jumps up and rolls off the guy the moment he notices Richie's presence. He blurts out a "sorry, sorry! Didn't know you'd be home!" but the damage is done. Richie already saw, already knows what they were about to do, and he definitely feels the violent twist of his stomach, threatening to spill the contents in his stomach all over the floor. He slams the door closed, blocking the sight of Eddie with his messed up hair, his red face, the little strip of skin that was showing because Eddie hadn't properly adjusted his shirt. He starts walking back down the hall and towards the open window as a weird dry-heave, half sob escapes his lips. His eyes are oddly tingly, his face feels hot, and he *knows*. There's only one explanation for reacting so violently towards the sight of Eddie with another guy: he's a homophobe. He's Richie Tozier, and he's a spineless, cowardly, dickwad of a homophobe.

It's not like he didn't know about Eddie's sexuality beforehand. Eddie had told him, that first time they met. That he was gay, that he knew that some guys would be uncomfortable having a gay guy for a roommate, how Eddie had wanted to make sure that Richie would be

fine with it, because Eddie didn't want to deal with any of that straight guy bullshit. Richie had told him he would very much be dealing with a lot of bullshit from Richie, but not the kind that Eddie was worried about. And so they became roommates. It was convenient for Richie, he was tired of the dorms, and the apartment that Eddie was living in was only a ten minute walk to most of his classes and a ten minute walk to a bus station that could take Richie to the city. And he had his own room now, not a shared one. He'd told Stan about that fact excitedly, who didn't seem to get the big deal. Probably because Stan had managed to get a full ride, which included his own single dorm. Which was awesome for Stan but meant that Richie's plans to room with his best friend had abruptly fallen through. He still liked Ben, the guy who actually ended up being his roommate, but it turned out that having to be in someone else's presence for an entire year was draining even for Richie.

So he was living in an actual apartment now, with an actual kitchen (not that Richie really knew what to do in there- but he was gonna learn dammit) and an actual room for himself. He loved it. Not to mention, his new roommate had looked like a tiny, angry little forty year old and it was cute. Eddie was adorable in every sense of the word, with his seemingly constant pout, his wide eyes, the slicked and brushed hair, the pink polos he was so fond of. And when he was home, he liked to change out of his jeans and put on a pair of little red shorts that showed off his surprisingly well-shaped legs. Eddie had told him, when they were first getting to know each other, that he had joined track in high school (after some grappling with his mother, but Eddie had oddly shrunk in on himself at the mention of his mother, and Richie for once didn't pry). He was also a finance major, not that he seemed to really like it, and a spanish minor, which meant walking around the house in those little shorts and practicing the way he rolled his r. Richie didn't understand a word of what he said at first, but he often found himself staring as Eddie delved into imaginary conversations with people. Conversations that always seemed to end with Eddie yelling angrily at said imaginary people, hands flailing around as he tried to win his little fight. Eddie also *loved* takeout. He wasn't really into clubs, Richie had learned. He was fine with going to bars and having a couple drinks, maybe listening to some live bands, but Eddie always seemed more excited when Richie came home with two bags of disturbingly cheap chinese

food in his hands. The two had formed a tradition every Friday to order food from somewhere, take it home, and just sit on the couch watching Netflix until 3am. Except for this night, apparently. Because apparently Eddie had decided to get himself a different snack. And Richie feels like someone had just stabbed him in the stomach repeatedly, and now he's bleeding out of the floor, goodbye Richie Tozier, it was nice to know you. Except not actually nice because, as Richie is just now learning, he was actually a pretty big piece of shit. Definitely not deserving of being Eddie's roommate. Perfect little Eddie with his perfect little smile that could light up a room, Eddie who specifically told Richie that he didn't want to deal with a homophobic roommate. And oh, there Eddie was now, cheeks still a little flushed from... well, just the idea of remembering how Eddie got that way makes Richie want to jump out the window, maybe if he's lucky he'll hit the ground just right that he cracks his head open and the memory of Eddie with another guy leaks out of his head with the rest of his dumbass brain. *You're being way too dramatic*, a voice that sounds like Bev whispers in his head.

"Sorry, sorry!" Eddie rushes out, hands waving in front of him. "I didn't expect you back so early, you're usually at work until 8 and I thought.. but I should have texted, oh my god, I can't believe you saw that." He's talking a mile a minute, and he might have slipped into some spanish, but Richie can't even really hear him. There's an odd ringing in his ears, and he feels a little like he's not actually there, like his soul has floated out of his body and is watching this exchange from above, and he should *really* say something right about now. Before Eddie spontaneously combusts, if the way Eddie's face is getting progressively pinker is any indication.

"It's ok, it's fine!" It's not fine. It is so not fine, but Eddie doesn't need to deal with his internal crisis right now. "I did... get off early, it's fine." *Is this what you do every time I'm working*, an ugly thought forms in his head, but he tries to ignore it. "I covered for Betty last week, so she decided to take my shift for me." He holds up a bag of takeout, sushi this time, from the good restaurant, not the one that gave him food poisoning for a week. It had cost him way more money than he could afford (a whole \$40 dollars) but he had been so excited to come home and surprise Eddie with it. Oh, how that plan failed horribly.

Eddie gives him a soft smile, one that alleviates the twisting in his stomach for a moment, makes him feel light as air. And then the guy that Eddie had been snogging comes out of their apartment, and oh there goes that good feeling. Is it too late to jump out the window? Or, even better, throw that guy out of the window. *No, stop that Richie, You can't commit murder, just think of the court fees.*

"Sorry for crashing your place, bro." The guy speaks, and god does he sound like a tool. What did Eddie even see in this guy? Sure, he looks like he's got an eight pack hiding under that shirt, and those arms look like they belong on the poster to the next big action film, and his jawline could cut diamonds, and he's in general much more well built and in shape than Richie's lanky frame. But Richie's still taller, so like, checkmate bitch. Not that Richie's comparing himself to this guy, why would he need to do that?

The guy runs a large hand through his perfectly styled hair, gives Eddie a small smile, and sighs. "I'll see you later, Eddie?" He asks, softly, but he doesn't wait for a reply as he starts walking down the stairs. Despite the fact that they have an elevator in this building, and this is the 7th floor, so he's clearly just showing off that he prefers the exercise. Eddie turns to him after a moment, taking the bag from Richie.

"Um, how much do I owe you?" Eddie asks, but Richie just shakes his head.

"Don't worry, I don't mind paying." He gestures awkwardly towards the stairs. "Since I, you know, crashed your little party." Eddie blushes, and he looks like he wants to protest, but he just nods. The knot in Richie's stomach is still there, but it hurts a little less now.

He wants to talk to Stan about this dilemma, but he's not sure he's actually ready for Stan to yell at him for being a homophobe. He can picture it now, the disapproving look on Stan's face as he realizes that his best friend of 8 years was actually secretly being a piece of shit this entire time. And as he walks to the Starbucks that Stan works at, he finds himself more and more anxious. He doesn't want Stan to hate him, even though Richie obviously deserves it. Stan

notices his anxiety, though, when Richie doesn't bother to ask him to put some ridiculous name on his cup or try to convince Stan to give him a free pastry. Ironically, Stan comes over on his break and hands Richie a pastry bag and a small coffee.

"Wow Stanny-boy, If I knew the secret free food was to shut up, I would have done it a long time ago!" Richie says, trying to keep his voice at his usual enthusiasm level, but it just sounds loud and fake to his ears. Stan raises an eyebrow.

"No you wouldn't have," He sets down the pastry, a simple blueberry muffin, and Richie doesn't even really feel like eating it but he needs to keep appearances. He takes a large and obnoxious bite, stuffing almost the entirety of it into his mouth and giving Stan a smile, crumbs falling out of his mouth. Stan's nose crinkles. "What's wrong?" Stan asks. Richie swallows awkwardly, ready to make any excuse he can think of, but stops. Across from them are two men, obviously a couple. The taller one has an arm around the other, pressing a kiss into his boyfriend's hair, who gives a little groan of protest but doesn't make any move to get out of it. Richie expects a feeling of disgust to come over him, but all he feels is a strange emptiness. And another feeling, something that feels a little like... longing? Of course, that can't be it, since, he knows, he's a homophobe. Overall, though, he doesn't feel anything bad towards them, they're just two guys living their lives. But then he thinks about Eddie straddling that guy and suddenly the twisting is back, and now there are little flickers of anger as he watches the couple and *wow* . Is he really so horrible that he gets angry at two guys existing in his general presence?

"Last friday I walked in on Eddie and some guy." He says abruptly, eyes still trained on the two men. He's not sure why, he really wasn't planning on telling Stan, but it slips out of his mouth before he can stop himself and now Stan is giving him a look of pity.

"Oh, Rich." Stan shakes his head, reaching out to pat Richie on the back. "I'm sorry, man. But I'm sure it'll work out." He assures him.

"Stan, I just, I saw them and I just... I felt so bad." Richie continues, which, *why* is he still talking? "And I was just like,, is this what he does when I'm not home? How many guys has he-Why is this even

happening?” It’s not like’s ever been homophobic before. He’s been friends with plenty of gay guys before, has congratulated them when they talk about boyfriends, so why is he suddenly so uncomfortable with this? Granted, he’s never actually walked in on them in action, and now that he thinks about it there’s always been a little pull in his gut whenever they mentioned it. He remembers once his lab partner in 11th grade had talked about how a boy had asked him out on a date, and Richie had smiled and told him he was happy for him, but he’d felt strangely hollow the rest of the day, even when a girl he had been seeing at the time had taken him out to a party that night and kissed him for the first time. Richie had given her a smile, downed the rest of his beer, went home and brushed his teeth for ten minutes. So yeah, maybe he’s always been a little homophobic, but it only came in full force when he saw Eddie and Mr. Perfect Jawline Man.

“Yeah, I know,” Stan says, shaking him out of his train of thought. It takes him a moment to even realize that Stan is replying to what he was saying. “I understand. But you’ll get through this.” Stan’s voice is so earnest, and Richie has never loved his friend more. He had thought that Stan would get angry, hate him even, but no. Here Stan is, telling him that he’ll be able to work through his own fucked up head and dispel his homophobia. Become a better person. And if Stan believes in him, surely he can do it. Stan is the best, after all.

“You think so?”

“Oh yeah,” Stan replies. “I knew the minute I saw you together. You and Eddie are practically made for each other.” Yeah. *Yeah*. Stan is right. Eddie and Richie are great roommates. They can bicker a lot, especially with cleaning the apartment, and they’re pretty different but in the end they’re both the same too. Richie can’t imagine being roommates with anyone else, and he and Eddie have only been living together for six months. Richie hadn’t brought up the idea to Eddie, but he had even imagined them as roommates after they both graduated. They just worked well together, the two of them. And if Richie wants to keep on being Eddie’s roommate, being Eddie’s *friend*, he has to get rid of this little problem.

Eddie's a finance major, but Richie is pretty sure he doesn't actually want to do that. He has too much energy, glows too brightly, to be cooped up at a desk all day. He deserves to be happy. He loves his spanish minor, Richie knows, loves learning about the cultures and the language. More importantly, he loves that half of his job in that minor is talking. Eddie *loves* to talk. When they first met, Richie had thought he looked so small and innocent. He also kind of looked like a dad with his khaki shorts and polo, his hair slicked and brushed, but like... an adorable, precious 5'6 dad. And Richie had looked at him, stood up, towering over Eddie at 6'3, shook his head and said in his signature British accent "well it's very nice to meet you, Eddie Spaghetti."

"Don't call me that, that's not my name." Eddie had snapped, face twisting immediately, tilting his head up to look at him straight in the eye. And then Eddie blushed, as if realizing how he sounded, ducking his head slightly before returning Richie's gaze and offering a shy smile. As if he *wanted* Richie to think of him as this delicate little person, meek and shy. But Richie had already seen it, that fire in his eyes, the confidence in his gaze, and he simply couldn't look away. Eddie deserved all his attention, and even though Eddie had to physically look up at him to meet his gaze, Richie could tell that Eddie was the one in charge. Eddie had sat down, and Richie sat across from him, completely and totally captivated. Eddie had shown him pictures of the apartment, told him about all the pros and cons of the place, the rent, and that he was gay. Richie had said he didn't care. He felt strangely giddy after he discovered that fact, a smile forming on his lips that he weirdly couldn't suppress. So he had moved in, and he didn't give up the nickname, although he opted for a plain and simple Eds most of the time. Eddie hated that one too, but he never really made an effort to stop Richie, and Richie kept saying it. Sometimes, he'd even see Eddie smile at the nickname, a quick little snort that he couldn't suppress, mainly when he was drunk. And making Eddie laugh made Richie feel lighter than air. So the nicknames stayed.

Eddie was cooking dinner when he got home that night. He wasn't that great at cooking, if Richie was being honest, but he would never

actually tell Eddie that. Besides, whenever Eddie cooked he always like to put on a stupid little apron, and he'd scrunch his nose while focusing, and Richie loved to see it. Eddie looks at him, as he enters, giving him a wave.

"Class was cancelled." Eddie says simply, when Richie sees him, but Richie already knows. Whenever class is cancelled, that means Eddie doesn't have to go out. And when Eddie doesn't have to go out he doesn't bother styling his hair. Which means that instead of the cute dad look he usually has, his hair is now curling and messy. It looks much better this way, to be honest. The curls frame his face better. Eddie's hair is longer since they first met, too, so those delightful curls brush against the back of his neck with every twist of his head. Richie thinks that if that guy were here, he would brush back those curls and place a gentle kiss on that neck, or maybe several. Eddie's pretty ticklish so he would probably instinctively move his head down to stop the kiss. Except the guy wouldn't stop because, well because Eddie's neck is inviting and kissable, and he would just move to another spot on his neck. Eddie would laugh and tell him to stop, as the guy moves to the other side of his neck, up his jaw, until eventually placing an open mouthed kiss to Eddie's smile. It would be tender, soft, and Eddie would be so happy as he shifts, hands going around Richie's neck to pull him closer and deepen the kiss and then Eddie fucking *drops* the entire bowl of whatever he was making onto the floor. The pot makes a loud bang, spilling what looks to be boiling soup all over the floor as Eddie yelps (that little fucker only has socks and shorts on, so his bare legs get splashed). Richie is far enough away to jump back and not get hit, and he gives Eddie a quick once over to make sure that he wasn't seriously burned (he wasn't) before he starts howling with laughter.

"What happened?" Richie practically wheezes, and Eddie gives him the finger in response.

"Heavier than I thought, alright dumbass?" Eddie says, but his cheeks are burning a lovely red, and Richie tries to compose himself.

"Alright, Eds, clearly this is some sign that you really want me to go and get a pizza." Richie turns, he still has his coat on so he just needs to grab his keys.

“No onions,” Eddie calls, face still red. He doesn’t need to say it, Richie already knows exactly how Eddie likes his pizza, but he gives Eddie a thumbs up anyway.

“Ya got it, Spaghetti! hawaiian pizza with extra onions.” Eddie scowls, and Richie blows him a kiss before he leaves the apartment. It’s only when he gets in the elevator that he remembers exactly what he’d been thinking about before Eddie dropped that soup. His throat goes strangely dry. He blames it on the cold. It is November, after all.

Eddie tells him about his mom on Christmas. Neither of them had gone home for Christmas, Richie because he hadn’t had the money, and Eddie because, well, his mom was a nightmare. Stan hadn’t flown back either, they both reasoned to themselves that flying cross country during one of the busiest times of the year, risking cancelled flights because of the horrible weather in Maine, wasn’t worth it. Also, Stan didn’t celebrate Christmas. So they stayed. Stan, Richie, and Bev had a little get together on the 20th, just for old time’s sake, because Bev wouldn’t be able to be with them during the actual date. She had started dating Ben, Richie’s old roommate, and would spend it with him. Apparently they met in some poetry class they both needed for their majors, *not* through Richie, which was kind of funny. Stan would have hung out with Richie, probably, but then Eddie had told him that he wasn’t going to go home and Richie had kind of.. forgotten to ask Stanley to hang. Could he have hung out with both of them? Obviously. Eddie and Stan had hit it off pretty quickly when they first met and both of them like to joke that they prefer each other over Richie (lies). But for some reason, Richie really wanted to be alone with Eddie. Which was weird, since they were together alone a lot, being roommates and all.

“And Bill got nominated as a candidate for this writing competition, I know it’s still early but if he wins he could get an internship at a publishing company,” Eddie was saying as Richie handed him a Diet Coke and some chow mein. They were sitting on their balcony (really more of a ledge with a railing) and just staring at the street below them.

“Bill is an english major, right?” Richie asks, and Eddie nods.

“He’s a great writer. Sucks at endings though.” Richie laughs, lifting up his soda. Eddie does the same, and they do a little toast.

“To Bill and his shitty endings, then. May he actually find a job in this crazy, debt ridden world.” It’s nice, this moment. The balcony (ledge) is really small, so his legs brush against Eddie’s every so often. Eddie’s hair is curly and loose instead of his usual neat look, he’s got a shirt on that is way too big and also definitely Richie’s, and he just looks really happy right now. That’s one thing that Richie is always amazed by. Eddie shows everyone his quiet, shy, and incredibly kind side. He shows his friends his loud, slightly angry, spitfire side. But only Richie gets to see Eddie so relaxed. He’s sitting with Richie, tapping a finger against his leg subconsciously, and his face is soft and gentle, the lights of the street dancing in his eyes.

“Mm, I should start applying for internships too, huh?” Eddie laughs, and Richie has to take a moment to compose himself enough to talk.

“Yeah, I should too. But LA is just.. so expensive. Like I need a paid internship, people.” Richie whines. Eddie laughs. “Man, it’s almost like LA is full of film and TV majors who all want a limited amount of internships.” He shakes his head exaggeratedly.

“Are you going back to Maine for the summer?” Eddie asks. Richie looks at him, but Eddie’s eyes are trained on his chow mein. There’s a furrow in his brow that tells Richie he’s thinking.

“Probably, yeah. I got a friend who stayed in Derry, fuck knows why. But don’t worry, Eddie Spaghetti, I won’t forget about you.” He pinches Eddie’s cheek, but Eddie swats him away. “What about you? Going back to New York?”

“Nah, I kind of... don’t want to.” Eddie shrugs. Richie doesn’t want to push it, but he’s curious. Usually when Eddie mentions home, he stiffens in a way that tells Richie to drop it, to joke about something else. But Eddie isn’t like that right now. A little bitter, yeah, but not like he’s gonna shut Richie out.

“Problems? What is it, Eds? An ex-lover, who can’t get over you?”

"My mom." Eddie shrugs. He's trying to be relaxed, but Richie can see the little twitch in his fingers, the slight crease in his forehead, his lips tugging downward. "I.. She didn't react well to me going so far."

"Well, yeah, California is pretty far I guess."

"Heh, yeah, anywhere out of the house is too far," Eddie huffs. "She was certain I'd leave the house and then, like, immediately die." Eddie tries to say it as a joke, but Richie gets the sense he shouldn't laugh.

"A little protective?" He asks instead.

"You could say that, yeah." They're both quiet for a few minutes. Eddie keeps his gaze focused on the ground below them, at the cars honking and people talking animatedly on the phone, but Richie can't seem to tear his gaze away from Eddie. His head feels like it's racing, but he can't make out a single thought, and his whole body is fidgety. He wants to do *something*, so badly, but he can't figure out what exactly it is. "I used to have an inhaler, you know."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. I didn't actually need it, but my mom convinced me I did. She always thought I was sick, or going to be. I grew up worrying about everything, analyzing risks, never really.. doing anything. Feel like I missed out on a lot. Like my life didn't start till Greta Keene told me that my medicine was all bullshit." And Eddie keeps talking. He talks about his mom and his medication and how much he hates his major. How he always wanted to just.. Be *carefree* and not worry or obsess. Maybe even get out into the world, help some people, get his hands dirty for once. He talks so fast and so long that the words blend together, but Richie oddly understands all of it. He guesses that he just... understands Eddie. When Eddie finally calms down, finally looks at Richie again, there's an odd look in his eyes. He opens his mouth, but no sound comes out, so he closes it again. Richie smiles at him, and Eddie smiles back. They go back to mindless chatter, like Eddie hadn't just ranted about his mother for half an hour. Richie tells him about a group project in one of his classes, Eddie complains about a finance class he has to take, and everything is fine again. Eddie takes a bite out of his chow mein, laughing at some random

comment Richie makes, and even with his mouth is full of food Richie can't help but think he looks cute cute cute. And Richie is the only one who gets to see him this way. Or maybe not. Maybe some other guy already has, and Richie can't help but think they don't deserve to see it. And he doesn't either.

It's been two months since Richie walked in on Eddie with some guy, and two months since his major revelation. Stan had told him that he believed in him, that Richie would get over his dumbass and accept Eddie's sexuality. But no matter how hard he tries, when he thinks back to that night he can't help but gag a little. He's been thinking about Eddie almost non-stop too. He nearly dropped several bottles of chemicals during his lab (and yeah Richie shouldn't have been carrying so many bottles, but whatever). He spent entire lectures zoning out in his classes, including the ones that he actually liked. He was even pulled aside from one teacher who had handed him back his pop quiz with a questioning stare, kindly informing him that "Eddie" had nothing to do with the significance of *Españolada* in Spanish film. Which is embarrassing sure. but not as embarrassing as the fact that Richie didn't even *recognize* half the questions on the quiz, despite taking it only a day ago. So in other words, he has an Eddie problem. Every time he thinks of Eddie, his stomach goes all wobbly, like someone has unleashed an army of moths in his ribcage. It would be obvious to anyone that Richie is having a hard time, so it's clearly obvious to Bev. She hasn't said anything to him about it, but it's clear that she notices. They're sitting at their usual spot, the small bench behind the library. Back in freshman year, they had used it to smoke, but neither of them have done that in a long time. Richie oddly wants one now, but he also knows that if he came home smelling of smoke Eddie would give him a disapproving look, so he sticks to a soda and a pack of oreos he got from a vending machine in the library. They both have their books out, but neither are studying.

"So," Bev says, once it's clear that Richie isn't going to start this conversation. "You gonna tell me what's wrong, Tozier?" She gives him a grin, green eyes sparkling, and Richie feels bad. Bev was like a

sister to him, they'd spent nearly every day together since they met as kids. He'd initially been a little hesitant to hang out with her, but Bev had proven herself to be a goddess in disguise. Whereas Stan just rolls his eyes at Richie's antics, Bev isn't afraid to just smack him on the head and give it to him straight.

"I'm a homophobe." Richie confesses. He knows that if he lies, Bev will know, so there's no point. "I know, I know, I'm a terrible person. I just..." He trails off, and his face feels oddly hot.

"Wait, hold on, what?" Bev raises a hand to shut him up, clearly confused, but she doesn't seem mad yet.

"I saw Eddie. With a guy," He explains, voice going oddly high. "They were on the couch and they were getting handsy and I walked in and, holy shit, Bev I hated it. Just, an instant wave of disgust. Except I'm the one who's disgusting, I'm the piece of shit." He sighs. "And I tried to get over it, because I care about Eddie, I mean Eddie's perfect and he definitely deserves a better roommate than me, and I don't wanna be a homophobe." Bev slaps a hand to his mouth, cutting him off. She's got a weird look in her eye, like she's tired and annoyed, but he still oddly doesn't see any hatred. If he were Bev, he would hate Richie right now. Hell, Richie as Richie hates himself right now.

"Richie, you're not a homophobe." Bev says dryly. "How did you even come to a conclusion like that? Wait, don't answer, I don't wanna know." Richie drags her hand away from his mouth.

"Then why am I feeling this way?" Bev laughs, and steals an oreo from him. Richie had forgotten he'd had those.

"Richie, you dumbass, you're jealous." Bev says simply, popping the oreo in her mouth and picking up her notebook. "That's all. You're just jealous." The two of them lapse into a comfortable silence, at least Bev does. Richie is still astounded. Is he jealous? Why would he even be jealous? That Eddie is able to get some, and Richie can't? Sure, Richie hasn't brought a girl home since he moved in. Actually, he's only really ever had sex with one girl, a really awkward affair that led to her never calling him again, and Richie never really bothering to reach out. It does make a little bit of sense, though.

Eddie is out there, apparently meeting people and getting it on, and Richie has kind of stalled in that department. And if Richie is jealous, then all he needs to do is start getting his own dates again. Back into the dating pool. Clubs, parties, drinking. Once he gets laid, this problem will go away and he and Eddie can get back to their regularly programmed routine. He's still not entirely sure if that's actually the solution, but if Bev thinks that all he needs it to get laid, there must be some truth to it. She's always known him better than he himself did, after all.

The girl is very pretty. She's got short, curly brown hair, dark eyes, a cute button nose and a winning smile. She's also very into Richie, if her giggles and the hand on his arm is anything to go by. Richie has never found himself to be the most attractive guy (giant glasses, an awkward bone structure, ridiculously wild hair, and a lanky frame aren't exactly hot model material) but if she is into it, he's not gonna say no. She had seemed nice enough at first, with a shy look in her eyes that gradually got more confident as they talked. Now, though, he's wondering if maybe she's a little too much for him, but it's fine, right? There's a hot lump in his throat that he tries to push down with some alcohol, but it always seems to make itself known whenever she gets a little too handsy. She leans into him, and Richie resists the urge to lean away.

"Do you maybe wanna... get out of here?" She whispers into his ear, and one of her hands is on his chest. He can feel the tips of her fingers (her nails are way too long, they feel almost like claws) digging ever so slightly into his skin. He nods, just slightly, despite the urge to run away from this entire scene. She doesn't seem to notice though, grabbing his hand and leading him out of the club. That, at least, Richie is thankful for. He hasn't been to a club in forever, and he might have enjoyed it once but he sure as hell doesn't enjoy it now, for whatever reason. The cool night air is definitely a relief, one that is promptly dispelled by the girl's nails digging just slightly into his arm. He looks over to see her fiddling with her phone, probably calling an Uber. Then she groans.

"7 minutes? Fucking ridiculous." She turns to him, and it strikes Richie that he doesn't even remember her name. Something with an E?

“Guess we’ll just have to wait here huh?” Richie tries to laugh, but she’s suddenly back in his personal space again, and he can feel her hot breath on his collarbone.

“Or maybe we can just go back into the club, maybe find a nice.. Bathroom.” She probably means to sound sexy, judging by the way she licks her lips a little and glances down, but all Richie can think about is how much Eddie would hate what she just said. Don’t a majority of home accidents happen in the bathroom or something? He’s pretty sure Eddie had told him that once.

“Richie?” Gasping, he whips around, and speak of the fucking devil because there is his little Eddie Spaghetti. Eddie, who is with Bill. Richie feels weird about that for a moment, he almost wants to tell Bill to get away from Eddie, but even drunk he knows that’s stupid. Bill has been Eddie’s friend for years. So he opts to awkwardly wave at the two.

“Umm.” The girl makes her presence known again.

“I’m sorry, who are you?” Eddie asks, and Richie bites back a laugh. He doesn’t know why. Maybe he’s drunker than he realized.

“Edith.” She says, curtly. “You are?”

“Eddie Spaghetti!” Richie chimes in, and if he were sober he probably would have cringed at how happy he sounds. “That’s my roommate.”

“Eddie.” Eddie says, glancing at Richie. He oddly doesn’t even attempt to look mad at the nickname. There’s something behind his expression, and Richie notices that Bill is also looking at the two of them weirdly.

“Well, Eddie,” She says it like it disgusts her almost, which is ridiculous. Who doesn’t love spaghetti? “We were just leaving.” She takes his hand, and Richie abruptly realizes he’s just kind of been staring at Eddie this whole time.

“Actually, I can take him.” Eddie says, and there’s something weird with his voice again. He almost sounds angry, but why would Eddie be angry? Oh god, it wasn’t because of him, was it? “Roommates and

all.”

“I’m not sure Richie wants to go home with you, honey.” She smiles. Her nails dig just a tiny bit further into his arm. That’s weird. Everyone is acting so weird, and he can’t figure it out. Hell, he can’t even figure out what Eddie is thinking, and he can usually always tell.

“I don’t think Richie’s in the right state of mind right now, Edith.” Bill speaks for the first time. There’s no stutter, why is there no stutter? “Maybe he can call you in the morning?” Eddie lets out what kind of sounds like a growl, and then he shrinks a little when everyone turns to look at him.

“Aw I see,” Edith coos. “I see what’s happening here, well sorry honey, but he’s not-” Richie doesn’t know what she was going to say, doesn’t even really care, because Eddie looks kind of panicked right now, and Richie can’t have that. He rips his arm away from her grasp and practically marches towards Eddie, pinching his cheek.

“Don’ be sad spagheddi!” He’s slurring his words slightly, wraps his arms around Eddie. Eddie fits perfectly, he notices, but doesn’t bother to analyze. Just focuses on the feeling of Eddie in his arms, carding his fingers through his hair, practically cooing at how soft it is. There’s an almost painful pang in his chest, and he feels the beginning of tears welling in his eyes.

“Yeah, we’re going to take him home.” Bill says, and Richie had kind of forgotten he was there. Had forgotten the girl, too. He doesn’t bother to look back, but he can hear her huff and the sound of heels clacking away at the pavement. And then the three of them are alone, although he still can’t see Bill, because he’s opted to bury his head in Eddie’s shoulder. God, he’s so relieved to be with Eddie again.

“Ok.” Eddie says, surprisingly soft, the first thing he’s said since Richie hugged him. He leans away a bit, which Richie whines at, but he gives Richie a smile and that’s good too. Eddie’s hand is on his cheek, when did that get there? “How about we go home, huh? Get you sobered up?” He nods. Bill runs back to get his car, and when he returns he and Eddie make Richie lie down in the backseat. Eddie, for whatever reason, decides to stay with him, which Richie takes as an

opportunity to lay his head on his lap.

“You’re warm.” Richie murmurs. He’s oddly sleepy right now. Eddie hums.

“You’re drunk.” Eddie states. “Little surprised, honestly. You haven’t been to a club in forever.”

“Yeah, well,” he shrugs, still looking up at Eddie. “Back to m’ old self y’know?” Maybe not the best thing to say, cause Eddie frowns a little. “What were you and Bill doin?”

“Food and then back to our study session? Guess both are out of the question.” Eddie laughs, running a hand through Richie’s hair.

“M hungry.” Richie says. He isn’t really, but he hates the thought that Eddie might be. “Burger?”

“Already p-p-pulling into in n out, Rich.” Bill says from the front seat.

“Mm. Love you guys.” Then he pokes at Eddie’s nose. “Really glad you came, Spaghetti.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. Wanted to spend it with you. Always do.” Eddie might reply to that, but by then Richie is already asleep.

He wakes up with a killer headache. He also wakes up in his room, with a water bottle and some pain killers on his bedside table, and the smell of pancakes coming from the kitchen room. Sweet. Then he remembers how last night ended. Significantly less sweet. At this point he’s not sure what’s wrong with him at all. He had tried to get his mind off the whole Eddie thing, but that had failed. He does still feel a wave of relief that his friends had come when they did, though. The thought of going home with a girl makes him want to down an entire bottle of vodka. He can’t believe it, but maybe Bev was wrong, because he had the same opportunity for sex and he had just... not wanted it. Was repulsed by it, even. Had to drink himself silly, and even then could barely muster up the courage to follow the girl. Probably wouldn’t have even done that if it weren’t for her leading

him out of the club herself. So it's probably not jealousy. Unless it's a jealousy that Richie is clearly going through some sex anxiety thing and Eddie isn't? Even then, he's not sure. Fuck.

Mike, for whatever reason, decided to stay in Derry. Richie's been trying to get him to move out to LA with them ever since, because he misses Mike dammit. He was arguably the only one in the group who was actually responsible. Sure, Stan is basically an old grandma, but he's also an old grandma who likes to fuck with people and watch the drama unfold. The kind of grandma who would write "to my favorite child" on her will and then watch as her kids fight about who that is. So Mike is the responsible one. He's also in LA for the week, which means that Eddie, Ben, and Bill finally get to meet the man that he, Stan, and Bev have all been raving about for all this time. And just like Richie would have predicted, they all instantly love Mike, because who doesn't love Mike? He has some questionable life choices considering he stayed in Derry, but other than that he's a top notch human being, and Richie swears that he'll convince Mike to come out here permanently anyway. Richie is so excited at Mike being back, at the seven of them all hanging out together for the first time, he almost forgets his problems. Almost. Tonight they've all elected to eat at a Chinese restaurant, a good one this time, not the one that Eddie and Richie frequent for takeouts. Eddie is sitting next to him, giving him small smiles whenever Richie looks at him, playing with the straw in his drink. He seems happy, happier than he's been all week, and Richie can't help but notice that Eddie's hand is so close to his on the table. Not touching, but close, and Richie swears that Eddie is purposefully moving closer to him, until he can practically feel the tips their pinkies touching. But that's ridiculous, why would Eddie be doing that on purpose?

Richie, truthfully, has been trying to avoid him for the past week. Ever since that disastrous night out, one he still hasn't told Bev out of sheer embarrassment, he's realized that this Eddie thing isn't going to be going away anytime soon. So he's been avoiding him, which is incredibly hard, not just because they live together but because Richie genuinely can't help but be drawn to Eddie. It's like a moth to a flame. But with Eddie comes the memory of Eddie with some guy,

and he doesn't care for that shit at all. He thought maybe that since it's been such a long time since Eddie and that guy hooked up, Richie might be able to just forget about it but, well-

"More water?" The waiter asks Eddie. Richie thinks he might have said his name at the beginning, but he can't remember it now and he doesn't really want to remember regardless. It's the fifth time he's approached the table, and it feels to Richie as if every ten seconds there's something this guy absolutely has to ask Eddie (and only Eddie). The rest of the table is ignored. Eddie's glass isn't even empty, it's half full, of course he doesn't need any water. And Bev's glass has been empty for twenty minutes, and the guy sure as hell hasn't seemed to notice that.

"I'm ok, thank you." Eddie replies, giving the guy a small smile. Richie huffs, and out of the corner of his eye he can see Ben giving him a concerned glance, but he doesn't want to acknowledge it. It's not like Ben would understand what he's going through. *He* doesn't even know what he's going through. All he knows right now is that this waiter is definitely into Eddie, and Richie really can't handle it. Stupid brain and its stupid homophobic tendencies.

"I'm gonna go to the bathroom." Richie says, maybe a bit too harshly, but he needs to step away from the situation before he does something stupid. He doesn't bother waiting for a reply, although he does notice Mike give him a raised eyebrow, look over at Eddie, and then back to Richie. He hurries over to the other side of the restaurant, almost running into a waitress with a tray of food, and finally finds himself in the blissfully empty bathroom.

"Hey." Ok. So it's not empty anymore. He turns to see Ben enter the bathroom, moving to stand next to Richie by the sinks.

"Hey, haystack." Richie replies, but even he can hear the odd bitterness in his voice. He feels bad about that, because Ben is truly the nicest guy on the planet. "Here to take a piss?"

"Just.." he gestures to Richie awkwardly. "Checking to make sure you're doing ok. Seemed kind of frazzled back there." Richie hums.

"Just peachy."

"I get it, you know." Ben says slowly. "I remember how hard it can be, but you and Eddie will figure it out."

"Eddie doesn't know, you know, that I- you know-" *am a horrible human being* . "Trying to figure it out myself." Ben frowns, confused.

"That.. won't work, Richie. If you want anything to come out of this, if you want to be with Eddie, you need to actually talk to him. It's terrifying, obviously, but it's worth it. And trust me, Eddie isn't going to react negatively or anything." He says that last part in a weird tone. "In fact, I think he'd have the opposite reaction of negative." Richie laughs. Of course Eddie is going to react negatively. He *knows* Eddie, and Eddie wouldn't put up with his bullshit if he found out. If he wants to keep being Eddie's friend, Eddie cannot find out about this. Still ,he appreciates Ben's efforts.

"All right, all right. Some truly wise words from our Benny-boy right here, I'll keep it in mind. Now *andale* , let's go. Wouldn't want Bev to think I'm stealing her man."

"All right, Rich. Come on." Ben laughs, eyes bright.

Richie feels marginally better, but unfortunately that feeling disappears the minute he walks back to the table, because that waiter is there *again* and he feels like screaming.

"Eddie!" He says instead, wrapping an arm around his roommate. He may also give the guy a death glare, which is uncalled for, but he's also got a very uncomfortable image of Eddie and this guy doing some borderline R-rated things in his mind, so Richie naturally defaults to asshole mode.

"Rich, get off!" Eddie whines then, but Richie isn't going to just let him go that easily. He wraps his other arm around him, rocking him back and forth on the chair, ignoring Eddie's shouts of protests. By the time Eddie breaks free, the waiter is gone again. Eddie doesn't even seem to notice.

The thing about the Eddie problem is that Richie never wanted it to

make itself known to Eddie. Regardless of what Richie feels, the need to make sure that Eddie feels safe and happy around him has always been his priority. Yeah, he annoys Eddie a lot (he can't help it), but he never wanted Eddie to feel legitimately angry at him. Unfortunately, he supposes it was bound to happen. It's obviously all Richie's fault of course.

Richie doesn't even anticipate it at first. Eddie didn't seem to notice anything, if anything he was actually... nicer around Richie. The way he looked at Richie turned.. Softer. And Eddie always seemed to be touching him in some way, from flopping down onto him as he was laying on the couch, to brushing their arms together as they walked, to nagging Richie about taking better care of his hair, both hands reaching up to run themselves through his dark locks. *That* last one had him biting back a small groan, and there had been a weird jolt in his stomach as Eddie's fingers accidentally tugged on a knot in his hair. So yeah. Eddie seemed to have gotten more comfortable around him. And Richie fucked it all up. They're both on their couch now, the Food Network playing softly in the background, and Richie's got a hand in Eddie's hair, idly playing with the dark locks.

"I'm thinking of changing my major," Eddie whispers over the sound of Guy Fieri (they have weird taste).

"Yeah?" Richie murmurs. He tugs Eddie in closer to him.

"Yeah. I was with Aaron yesterday-"

"Wait, who's Aaron?" Eddie blushes.

"Uh, well, not sure if you remember, but that guy? The one that you, um, walked in on me with?" Richie's suddenly very, very cold. Aaron. What a dumb name. Who needs two As in their name? He stiffens, and Eddie turns his head away from the TV to look at him worriedly. "I haven't - we haven't done anything since, don't worry."

"Why would I worry about that?" Richie asks, and he can't quite stop the bitterness from creeping into his tone. Eddie frowns.

"I just.. Nevermind. I was with him, and we passed by the study abroad building. There's a summer program in El Salvador. It's

basically activism, helping kids get better living conditions. I'm already a spanish minor, but I need to have a major in the college of arts and sciences." Eddie looks excited, which would usually make Richie excited too, but he can't get over the Aaron thing. "And with my minor and all, I was thinking maybe I could change my major to something involving... managing charities or something? Like helping people in other countries get proper healthcare?" He's looking at Richie with a nervous energy in his eyes, and Richie knows that he's waiting for Richie's opinion. Richie would usually be ecstatic, because it sounds perfect for Eddie. And if he goes to El Salvador he could finally put his spanish minor to use, outside of that one Subway store near their house, where the lady working behind the counter gives Eddie extra cheese when he speaks to her in spanish. But, well...

"So you and Aaron are going?" It's not the right thing to say. He knows it, and he especially knows it when Eddie's face falls.

"Well, yeah he wants to go too and I know-"

"So basically you're leaving me to go hang out with Aaron?" He doesn't know why he words it like that. He's not even angry, per say. There's more of an empty feeling in his stomach. *It's ok*, he wants to say, *if this is what you really want I'll be ok with it*. The words don't come out though, stuck in his throat.

"What are you talking about, you're leaving for the summer too! And I haven't been giving you shit about it!" Eddie sounds angry, but then he seems to see something in Richie's eyes, because his face softens. "Look, Richie, it's not like that. He's just a friend."

"Yeah, sure, friends." Richie scoffs, trying to sound teasing. He doesn't know why Eddie is denying it, he literally walked in on him and Aaron.

"Yeah, Richie, friends. What kind of person do you think I am?" Eddie seems mad again. Ok, so maybe Richie didn't come across as light-hearted and teasing as he meant to be. He tries again.

"Look if you want to go prancing around with Aaron-"

“Prancing?” Shit, Eddie’s even angrier now. Richie is trying to tell him that it’s ok, he is totally fine with Eddie actively being gay (he’s actually not, but he doesn’t want Eddie to know). He’s really panicking now.

“Not- not like in a stereotypical gay way just like if you want to be with Aaron-”

“Richie.” Eddie’s voice is strange now. “Are you serious?”

“Well, yeah. Eddie, if you like, Aaron you should go out with him.” Richie gives him a smile, but it feels forced. “I’ll find a hot babe to keep me company, and you can do your...your thing.” He hesitates at the very idea of Eddie dating another guy, trying to calm the rolling in his stomach. Eddie must see his discomfort though, must sense that Richie isn’t as cool with this as he tries to be, because his expression turns hard.

“You don’t actually like me.” It’s a statement. “Oh my god, you..I thought... and you don’t like me. I’m sorry, I-” There are tears welling in Eddie’s eyes now, and Richie is freaking out now. What had he said to give it away? He’d been trying so hard to hide his bigotry, but somehow Eddie had still seen. He had *hurt* Eddie. So much so that he’d driven Eddie, sweet perfect beautiful Eddie, to tears, and all because he couldn’t get over his own bigotry.

“Eds, I’m so sorry, I-” He reaches out to try and wipe away the tears, but Eddie jolts back like he’d been burned. It feels like a knife has been plunged into Richie’s stomach. He tries to reach out again, which he knows is a bad idea, but he’s so desperate to make things right and keep Eddie here. With him.

“No, don’t - please don’t-” Eddie shoves him away again. “Stop *touching* me, please.”

So Richie does. Lets his hands fall to his sides, even though all he wants is to wrap Eddie in a hug and keep him safe. And Eddie? Eddie gets up and leaves, mumbling out a hurried “I’m really sorry.” That breaks Richie’s heart even more, that Eddie feels the need to apologize to *Richie*, just for being who he was. Before Richie can even attempt to apologize to him back, Eddie is slamming his door closed,

and Richie is alone.

“I’ve fucked up.” Is the first thing he says when he gets to Stan’s dorm. He’d run over the minute Eddie had closed his door, hadn’t even stopped to take his car. Stan raises an eyebrow at him, panting and sweating, but he must see that Richie is genuinely distraught right now, so he only opens the door wider for Richie to come in. Mike is also there too, apparently, chilling on the bed with a giant book on bird watching (probably taken from Stan’s bookshelf) and staring at Richie. Why Mike is there in the middle of the night is beyond Richie, but he doesn’t really bother to think about it. Maybe there was a new online crossword puzzle that the two wanted to do together or some shit like that.

“What happened?” Stan asks. He’s already moving to his desk where he keeps some spare tea packets. Richie doesn’t drink tea, but he does like to hold the warm mug in his hands and stir some honey in. It’s oddly comforting. Mike gets up, and Richie takes a seat on Stan’s bed, already grabbing the blanket and wrapping himself in it.

“I fucked up.”

“You said. Mind elaborating?” Richie adjusts his glasses.

“Eddie’s changing his major.”

“That’s good?”

“Eddie wants to go abroad. El Salvador, I think.”

“Richie, I don’t really see the problem.” Stan hands him a mug of hot water and a spoon, slipping the tea bag in.

“I...I don’t know, he wanted to go with that one guy that I caught him with three months ago and-”

“Wait-” Mike holds up a hand. “Guy?”

“Yeah, I accidentally walked in on him with a guy and-”

“Wait wait wait. I thought-”

“No,” Stan says, cutting Mike off. “Richie hasn’t made a move yet.”

“Wait *what* ?” Mike sounds shocked. “But-”

“I know.” Stan says, giving Mike a weird look. “Trust me, I know.”

“Um. Can anyone tell me what’s going on?” Richie raises his hand. “Professor Urine? Explaining? Is that a thing that’s going to happen?”

“What do you mean, Richie?” Stan narrows his eyes. “Wait. Wait, fuck. What’s the problem, Richie?”

“Eddie found out that I’m...” He takes a shaky breath. “That I’m homophobic.” There’s a silence in the room. Then Stan makes a noise that sounds oddly like a cat dying and a donkey braying at the same time. He tilts over, clutching his stomach, and turns away from Richie. His shoulders are shaking. Mike, for his part, just narrows his eyes in confusion, and then something seems to dawn on him. Stan makes another dying cat noise, then another, and is he laughing and gagging at the same time?

“Richie, what, and know that I love you more than I could ever say, the *fuck* . How did you even come to that conclusion?” Stan finally turns to him, and Richie can see him physically trying not to laugh again.

“What?” Richie asks dumbly.

“You’re not homophobic, Richie.” Mike says.

“What? No, I-”

“Richie. You are not homophobic.” Mike says again. At Richie’s confused look, he sighs. “Richie. You. Are. Jealous.”

“No, no.” He’s shaking his head. “Bev already proposed that, and I considered it but when I went out to the clubs I didn’t even want to hook up with anyone. So like, I can’t be jealous that Eddie is getting some and I’m not.”

“Oh my fuck.” Stan wheezes in the background, any progress he had made in composing himself now gone. Mike’s eyes have gotten progressively wider throughout this whole exchange, but for the most part he’s still calm. Certainly more than that jackass Stan.

“Richie,” Mike begins gently. “You-”

“You’re gay for Eddie.” Stan cuts in. “You have gay feelings for Eddie and you were gay jealous of the guy Eddie was hooking up with because you also want to have gay sex with Eddie. Because you are gay for him. It’s gay. Understand yet?” Richie sputters. He decidedly does not get it.

“Stan I- I’m not gay!”

“Maybe, maybe not, but you still like Eddie.” Stan deadpans. Richie looks to Mike, expecting him to speak up and tell Stan how ridiculous he’s being, only to see that Mike is looking at him with a sympathetic face. Oh god. Oh no. No. This can’t be right. He can’t like Eddie like that, it’s not like that, he just..

He just wants to see him when he wakes up in the morning and right before he goes to bed. He wants to make Eddie dinner. He wants Eddie to curl up next to him with a bowl of popcorn as they watch shitty horror movies. Wants to make jokes and watch as Eddie tries not to laugh. Wants to see him wearing Richie’s oversized clothes. Wants to see his wild curls that frame his face so beautifully whenever he doesn’t bother to style his hair. Wants to see him rub his eyes whenever he’s sleepy, murmuring that he’s not tired and he can absolutely stay up another hour. Wants to hear Eddie practice his spanish in the living room. He wants Eddie’s attention and he wants Eddie’s time. Richie’s head is pounding his heart is aching and he *wants* so much. He wants...he wants... he wants...

Eddie. He wants Eddie.

Richie remembers when he was six, his mother used to read him stories. It was an effort to get him to pay attention to things. His father had asked if maybe they should take him to a doctor, maybe get tested, but his mother had insisted that she knew what was best for him.

“My coworker says she used to be on medication, and she became *addicted* .” She said to his father, looking quickly over at Richie. “She can’t focus at all without them, now. It’s so sad. Richie just needs to learn how to deal with it, and I’ll be there to help him, like a good mother.” And her solution had been stories. He liked to listen to her, liked to hear her soothing voice, but his mind still raced a mile a minute, and he couldn’t help but play with her hair or grab at his feet. She liked reading him fairy tales, ones from her own childhood, and in each and every one there was a strong prince who saved the damsel in distress through some way or another.

“Mom,” he asked during one reading of Snow White. “Does the guy always get the girl?”

“Of course, sweetie.” She kissed his head. “You’ll be a great big prince one day too, you know.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Is the damsel always a girl?” He started playing with her hair, twisting a dark lock in his hands. He might have actually been creating a knot, but his mom doesn’t seem to mind.

“Of course, Richie.”

“Why? It’s kind of gross”

“That’s just how the story is, baby.” She leaned in, whispering exaggeratedly. “Don’t worry, one day you’ll be all about the ladies.” She started to tickle his sides, and Richie shrieked in laughter, moving to try and get away. “My little man, breaker of hearts!” By the time she finished her tickle attack, Richie had practically forgotten the conversation before.

Richie remembers when he was nine, his mother had to pick him up from school early. Henry Bowers, a kid two grades above him, had pushed him off the swings and called him a fag. Richie had fought back, because he was never the smartest kid, and even though he didn't know what it meant he knew that it was meant as an insult. And because he fought back the school had sent him home, and his mom had taken him out for ice cream.

"You did nothing wrong, Richie," She explained patiently, handing him a cone with a scoop of rainbow colored sherbet and a cherry on top. "You were just defending yourself, god knows that boy hasn't been disciplined properly." Richie giggled at that, and took a big lick from the ice cream.

"He called me something, ma." Richie said. "Fag?" His mother bristled at the word. "What's a fag, mom?"

"It's.. it's a boy who likes other boys." She says slowly, eyes trained on her own ice cream: a cup of yogurt and berries. "It's a very mean term to call them."

"Boys can like boys?"

"Yes, some do." His mom explained. She looked uncomfortable. "And that's perfectly fine. But you don't have to worry about that, Richie. You're not like that." She pushed up his glasses, from where they had been falling off his face, and gives him a silly face. He giggles, but the conversation nags at him for the rest of the day.

Richie remembers when he was twelve, his father sat him down to talk to him about the middle school dance. Richie hadn't wanted to go, but his mother had insisted. She wanted to be able to take pictures of her baby boy becoming a man, as she put it. So Richie had asked the first girl he'd seen : Betty Ripsom.

"Now son, I want to go over some ground rules with you." His dad said, his voice stern, but his eyes were sparkling in a way that Richie

knew meant he was joking. "I want you take Betty home by 9 o'clock, alright? No hanky panky." Richie groaned. "I know what it's like to be a boy at your age, and trust me, it's better to wait a little, alright?"

"Yeah, dad, I get it," Richie replied, but he didn't really get it. He hadn't been thinking about doing anything with Betty Ripsom. He was twelve, for Christ's sake. His dad laughed again, and slapped his back.

"Ah, look at him, Maggie. Soon he'll be stealing all the girls hearts."

"He's a ladies man, alright." Maggie agreed, walking over to adjust Richie's hair. "Honey, why don't you take off that hawaiian shirt? You look much better in the shirt I bought you last week. I want you to look your best for Betty."

Richie remembers when he was thirteen, he discovered a new way to use the internet. He did not, however, discover the art of hiding it. His mother had used the family laptop right after him, and almost immediately found the video. It had just been a thirty second long video, a guy in front of his webcam, rubbing himself through his boxers.

"Richie, we need to talk." She had said later that night. "I know you're getting older, and you're.. Curious about things." Richie had been frozen, his cheeks reddening instantly as he saw the laptop she was holding.

"I don't know what you're talking about." Richie said, but they both knew it was a lie.

"I just don't want you watching... those kinds of things." His mother says. "I mean, Richie, that's inappropriate. And you're not... like that, alright? You're my boy."

"I-" He doesn't know what to say, so he just stops. She pinches his cheek, a warm smile on her face.

"Don't worry, you're going to find a lovely girl one day. I know it,

because I know *you* .”

Richie remembers when he was fifteen, he had started hanging out with Vic and Belch. It had only been for a couple of months, they all shared the same gym class and Richie needed people to hang out with. The three of them sat by the bleachers, where the teacher couldn't see them, sharing a pack of cigs. In front of him, Henry Bowers and Patrick Hockstetter are pushing around their next victim: some freshman who dared come to school with a pink shirt and a weird looking hat.

“Look at the little fag,” Vic laughed, motioning with his cig. “He’s jumping to get his little *hat*. ”

“Don’t be an ass, Vic,” Richie said before he could stop himself. He sees Vic turn to him out of the corner of his eye.

“What, you gay now, too Richie?” Vic asked. “That your boyfriend over there?”

“He’s not gay, Vic.” Belch laughed, like the very idea was hilarious.

“Obviously I’m not,” Richie adjusted his glasses. “But it’s not like people who *are* can help it. It ‘s just who they are.” He made sure to put emphasis on they. “Don’t have to give them a hard time for it.”

“Whatever, Rich. Be a little gay ally if you want, just as long as you don’t turn into one.” Vic said roughly, clearly ending the conversation that hadn’t even really started. Richie knew better than to reply.

Richie remembers when he was seventeen, he had sex with Greta Keene. They were seniors, they were bored, and Greta asked him if he *really* wanted to be the only virgin in college next year.

“No.” Richie replied, because obviously not. He never wanted to be left out.

"Then come on," She tugged on his shirt playfully. "You do want to have sex with me right? A real girl, not just your hand." She snickered.

"Of course." Richie replied. Obviously, he wanted to have sex with girls. It was part of who he was, who everyone knew him to be. "I like you, Greta. I do." Because Richie liked girls. He did.

It's always been like this, he thinks. He's always known, but maybe he'd forgotten along the way. Forgotten that he was hiding. Or maybe he never even entertained the idea that he might be hiding. He had gotten so good at it, and then Eddie had come along and broke down the fairy tale he had created inside his head. And now Eddie was mad at him. Stan and Mike are both still looking at him, concerned gazes on both of their faces.

"Are you ok?" Mike asks softly.

"Honestly, no."

"Did you... did you really not know?" Mike's voice is still soft, kind, but Richie doesn't know how to respond. His whole life had been other people separating him from *them*, and Richie had never bothered to ask if maybe other people were wrong. And maybe he could have spent his whole life in denial, ignoring any other feelings, but he can't ignore Eddie.

"I like Eddie." He blushes. "I really like Eddie. Maybe even love. No. I definitely do, he's perfect."

"Definitely perfect for your annoying ass, yeah." Stan says, and Richie can tell he's trying to sound sarcastic, but he's grinning and his voice is soft.

"And I fucked it up. And he's never going to talk to me again." Richie groans. Stan's smile disappears.

"You didn't fuck it up, I mean anyone with eyes can see that Eddie likes you."

"No he doesn't." Richie's voice is firm, so much so that they both give him looks of surprise.

"What are you talking about? Of course he does. Yeah, you got into a fight, but-"

"No, Mike, he doesn't. He- I-" Richie can't find the words, can't possibly explain it in a way that would make them understand.

"Richie." Stan kneels in front of him, takes the mug of tea from his hands. It's gone cold.

"I just.. He's so good, Stan. And I'm so... he wouldn't... I'm not enough for him." Richie confesses, staring at the striped pattern of Stan's shirt. There's a knot in his chest, it feels like it's pressing on his lungs, stopping him from breathing. Stan lifts his head with a finger, eyes determined, but his touch is still gentle. When he sees that he has Richie's attention, he softens.

"You are enough, Richie. You always have been, always will be."

"But there's no way he likes me like that, Stan. He-"

Don't you think that's something for him to decide?" Stan cuts him off. Richie swallows.

"How do I fix this?" He asks, looking up at his friends.

"Well, probably have to start by apologizing. And explaining." Mike says. "You know... confessing."

"Yeah, yeah. Ok. I'll do that." He feels breathless, in a daze, as he moves to stand up.

"And Rich?" Stan asks right before Richie leaves. Richie turns to Stan, sees the grin on Stan's face. "I'm really proud of you. Dude."

"Thanks, Stan the man." And then he leaves, practically running out of the building. All he can think is Eddie Eddie *Eddie* .

He's twenty three, and he finally knows who he is.

“Eddie. Eddie. Eddie. Eddie. Spaghetti head. Eds. My dear. Spagetti-o-” He repeats Eddie’s name, knocking on his door. “Not gonna leave, or stop knocking, until you answer the door. Come on Eddie. Eddie. Eddie. Eddie. Need to talk to you-” Eddie rips open the door, giving Richie a glare, but it’s pretty half-hearted. It’s also undermined by the tear tracks staining his cheeks, and it makes Richie want to wrap him in a hug. Or kiss away the tears. That would be good, too, but he knows that Eddie wouldn’t appreciate that, at least without Richie explaining himself first.

“What do you want Richie? Here to make fun of me?”

“Would never do that Eds. Not seriously.” Eddie frowns, but he doesn’t slam the door in his face, so clearly Eddie knows on some level that Richie is serious. “Look, just- Can we talk? Or let me talk at least? I can buy you a coffee?”

“Richie, it’s like 1am. There are no coffee places open.”

That’s how they both find themselves at a Denny’s in the middle of the night, two hot coffees between them. Eddie’s got dark bags under his eyes from lack of sleep, his hair is mussed and undone, and he’s wearing black sweatpants and a dark hoodie that is far too big for him (oh shit, Richie recognizes that hoodie actually, it’s his). In other words, he looks perfect. How Richie could ever think that he wasn’t hopelessly in love with this boy is beyond him, now that he knows.

“So,” Richie starts. “I’m sorry. I’ve been going through some stuff, for three months now actually.” Eddie sighs.

“Look Richie, it’s fine, I just-” Eddie stops, runs a finger along the rim of his cup. “I just misread the situation I guess.”

“No, you were right. I thought that too.” Richie says. Eddie winces, like somehow that hurts more.

“But I know now. I’m not a homophobe.”

“Wait, what?”

"I'm not a homophobe. I'm an asshole, and a dick, but I'm not a homophobe." Eddie's giving him a flabbergasted look now.

"Wait what? I never thought you were a homophobe? Were you a homophobe?"

"No, that's not what I'm saying" Richie throws up his hands. "I'm saying I thought I was."

"Why the fuck would you think that?"

"Oh my god, let me talk." Richie sputters. Eddie looks sheepish now, but he also looks less sad, so that's a start. "Alright. Eddie, I saw you with Aaron-" Eddie groans.

"Oh come on, Rich!"

"Jeezus, a guy tries to confess his love to you and you keep interrupting every second!" Richie groans, and then realizes what he just said. He looks to Eddie, who also looks surprised. Richie waits for Eddie to respond, to say something, but Eddie only motions for Richie to go on. He's got an odd smirk on his face. "Alright, um. So I saw you with this guy, and I was like.. Holy shit, that does not make me feel good. And because I'm an idiot, I thought that I was being homophobic. But I wasn't I was actually just... really into you, and it made me sad. And I only just realized, like an hour ago, that I'm in love with you. So, still a little wired, definitely running on adrenaline, and I feel like I need to tell you before I chicken out. And you don't have to love me back. I understand. I just.. It took me a long time to realize that I liked you, took me a long time for me to realize who I was. And I want you to know. You don't have to love me back, you don't have to do anything, but I needed to say it. For myself, and also for you, because I love you so much and I want you to be happy. Whether that's with Aaron or someone else, I'll be there to support you. I promise." The nerves are setting in now, but he refuses to make a joke or do anything about it. If anything in his life is genuine, it's Eddie, and he owes Eddie this one moment of seriousness.

"Richie.. You dumbass." Eddie laughs. He sounds so *happy*. Richie gives him a confused look, but Eddie only moves to reach over the

table and push up Richie's glasses. "Let me talk now, yeah?" Richie nods. "Being your roommate was awful."

"Wait, hey!" Richie protests. "I thought what we had was great!"

"Shut up, Richie. It was awful, Not because *you* were awful, but because you were great. So great. You just... were so nice to me, and you always made me laugh, even though you're so not funny. Being around you was more fun than I've ever had in a long time, you make even the simplest of things an adventure. Like the time you completely burned the turkey on thanksgiving and we had to drive around LA to find a suitable Peking duck, only to come back to the apartment and remember that Stan was put in charge of making the turkey. You were- you are- perfect, and I never felt happier or more safe than when I was with you. And it sucked so much, because I thought that you would never feel the same way. And then these past three months you'd been... looking at me more, and touching me more. And all of our friends were laughing behind our backs, except they're really loud so I obviously noticed and it was embarrassing as hell, but also not because it was with you. And I thought we were on the same page, and I thought we weren't, and that I had horribly misjudged the situation and you were just being friendly to me. Now you're here telling me that you weren't even on the same page as yourself, and I just-" Eddie stops to look at him. He looks transfixed for a moment, like he can't believe what's in front of him. "I love you, Richie Tozier. I've loved you for a long time." And then Eddie does it. He leans across the table and gives him a kiss. A quick one, barely a peck, but Richie can feel the softness of his lips. It's perfect, it's astonishingly perfect, it's - oh shit. "Are you crying?"

"No!" Richie sputters, but the tears have already started to roll down his cheeks. He wipes away at them frantically in an effort to compose himself, but then he sees Eddie grinning at him and a new wave of tears takes over because holy shit Eddie *loves* him. "Let's just go, man, I can't be seen like this. Not in a holy place like Denny's." They both get up, Richie already grabbing a ten dollar bill from his wallet (too much money, but he doesn't care).

"Denny's is holy?" Eddie snorts. "Come on, it can't be that good."

"Of course it is, Eds, haven't you tried their pancakes?"

"I've actually never been."

"Wait, you've never eaten at Denny's?" Eddie shakes his head.

"You really think my mom would let me eat here?"

What? No. I gotta fix this, sit back down." Richie orders, wiping at his eyes again. This is more important than his stupid embarrassing waterworks show. Eddie complies, eyes fond as he stares at Richie. 'It's the perfect night for Denny's anyway. It's been a wild day, lots of emotions going down, and it's 1am. That's when Denny's is it at its finest, beaten only by 2am"

"If it's better at 2am, then its not at it's finest-"

"Eduardo, no, don't interrupt me. I'm the captain now, alright? You're listening to me. We're getting pancakes and eggs. Scrambled eggs, not over easy. And orange juice. Prepare to have your mind blown, Spaghetti head." Eddie laughs as Richie talks.

"I guess this is as good a first date as any." Eddie remarks slyly. Richie abruptly stops talking, mind going blank, because Eddie is right. This is a date. He's going on a date with Eddie Kaspbrak. His *first* date with Eddie Kaspbrak. He's in shock, he's dying, Eddie killed him, and he's laughing again. Little fucker.

"Shut up," Richie finally manages to say. "Tell me more about El Salvador? You never really told me which major you decided on." Eddie's face brightens, and he immediately launches into a lecture on what the program was about and what Eddie wants to achieve over there, and Richie can't help but be smitten.

"Wait. Richie didn't know???" Bev practically screams. Other customers in IN-N-OUT look at her with annoyance, but she clearly doesn't care. "I literally told him that he was jealous!"

"And the idiot thought you meant he was jealous that Eddie was getting laid and he wasn't." Stan says, a shit eating grin on his face.

Normally, Richie would defend himself, but he can't find it in himself to care.

"Aw, look at him, he's *smitten* ." Ben coos. Another thing that Richie would usually try to defend, because he has an image to maintain dammit, but that would mean taking his attention off Eddie for a moment, and he can't do that. Because Eddie is holding his hand. He's holding Eddie's hand. They're holding hands, as *boyfriends* , because Eddie is his *boyfriend* . If anyone asks, Richie is not tearing up. There's just too much raw onion in his burger, and it's making him tear up. Totally normal human response to that.

"Honestly, Rich, you made this so much harder than it needed to be." Bev groans. They all laugh again, and Eddie squeezes his hand from underneath the table. Richie hums and squeezes back, not even bothering to think of a retort to Bev's comment. Sorry folks, he's out of commission for the time being. At least an hour, maybe even two.

"He's speechless." Bill laughs again. "Eddie, you d-d-did it! He's speechless!" Around them, their friends all laugh, but their eyes are fond and Richie has never felt so happy in his entire life.

"Yeah, well, I can't help it if I wanna look at my sweet Eds, he's just so cute cute cute!" He pinches Eddie's cheek with the hand not currently holding Eddie's, and Eddie laughs, half-heartedly attempting to dodge.

"Shut up, Richie."

"Bah, you love me, Eds."

"Yeah." Eddie's smile is fond. "I do. I really do." And well, Richie can't help but smile at that.